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New Jet Boosts U.S. In Commercial Race

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WASHINGTON.

Development of the A-11, a jet fighter with a speed above 2,000 M.P.H., may well put the United States ahead of its British-French competitors in producing a supersonic passenger plane.

This point was stressed here yesterday by aviation experts in discussing—exultantly but very cautiously—President Johnson's revelation of the new aircraft at his Saturday press conference.

These experts saw the key point in Mr. Johnson's announcement in disclosure that the A-11 project, under development since 1959, has mastered "the metallurgy and fabrication of titanium metal, which is required for the high temperatures experienced by aircraft traveling at more than three times the speed of sound."

Production of such a metal in proper form was deemed

one of the major obstacles to be overcome in producing an American supersonic passenger plane to fly at speeds ranging from 1,600 to 2,000 M.P.H., or faster.

Yesterday, Sen. Richard B. Russell, D., Ga., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, revealed that at least a dozen of the new A-11s are being test-flown. "It's a remarkable plane," he said on the CBS-TV program "Face the Nation."

Sen. Russell said he knew of the project since its 1959 beginning. He also revealed that he had chopped \$40 million for research and development of a fighter plane from the Air Force's recent \$17 billion fund authorization request, because he knew about the A-11.

Asked why the Air Force had asked for the money if it too knew about the A-11, the Senator said: "I can't answer that question."

Referring to the A-11 testing, Sen. Russell said: "They

have been conducting a wide series of tests that will apply not only to interceptor (fighter) planes, but to almost any other kind of planes, reconnaissance, passenger planes, commercial planes. There are many entirely new developments in the art of this plane that have not appeared in any other airplane."

This may very well shave months, perhaps a year or more, from the target time allowed by aircraft and engine companies to solve a problem that already has been solved, aircraft experts declared. Development of the A-11 was as much a secret to them as to the man in the street.

As a result, they added, there is a good chance the U. S. will have its supersonic transport in operation as soon as, if not before, the highly touted Concorde, a 1,450-M.P.H. passenger transport being jointly developed by Britain and France.